

As a consumer of digital content, I have a grave concern about the proposed Broadcast Flag. The initial comments of the MPAA and others aligned with its position ignore the consumer's side of the digital television bargain. This is troubling if the object of this proceeding is to convince consumers to buy digital television devices.

The MPAA would have the Commission believe that the DTV transition is best served by forcing consumers to receive DTV content only by means of special-purpose DTV devices. The truth is that general-purpose computers can do more while costing less.

If Hollywood and the MPAA would have adopted this approach in the early 1970s, the VCR as a consumer electronics product would have never been created. Imagine the damage to, ironically enough, MPAA members and other members of the "Hollywood community" if this had come to pass. A whole segment of our economy (and the tax dollars it creates) would not exist today. No video stores, pre-recorded tapes & other media, VCRs, PVRs, video capture cards, etc. This would have a large ripple effect as well, reducing the sales of other products such as food consumed while watching rented or time shifted material.

Banning technology through fear is an extraordinarily bad idea. It stifles not only consumer choice but innovation, the engine that has traditionally driven our economy. Entire economic segments and product categories with a myriad of uses will never be created. Some of these cannot be imagined today, but could create a new class of products for consumers and, consequently, an addition to our economy as a whole.

The digital television transition relies on convincing consumers of the benefits of switching to and buying digital television equipment. That transition will be far more palatable to me as a consumer if switching doesn't mean discarding my existing home network, buying new high-resolutions displays, and finding room for yet another device in my living room. Please do not allow the MPAA and its allies to hinder the transition by making us set aside our computers and buy special-purpose DTV devices that are more expensive and less valuable.

In addition, I am very concerned about the fair-use implications of the broadcast flag. With today's technology, I can be more than a passive recipient of content; I can modify, create and participate. I can record TV to watch later; clip a small piece of TV and splice it into a home movie; send an email clip of my child's football game to a distant relative; or record a TV program onto a DVD and play it at my friend's apartment. The broadcast flag seems designed to remove this control and flexibility that I enjoy.

I am a law-abiding consumer who believes that piracy should be prevented and prosecuted. However, if theoretical prevention comes at the cost of prohibiting me from making legal, personal use of my content, then the FCC should be working to protect all consumers rather than enable those who would restrict consumer rights. In the case of the broadcast flag, it seems that it will have little effect on piracy. With file-sharing networks, a TV program has only to be cracked once, and it will propagate rapidly across the Internet. So, while I may be required to purchase consumer electronic devices that cost more and allow me to do less, piracy will not be diminished.